

Finding reciprocal links for your site

By Dianne Reuby

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Dianne Reuby
admin@firstwebbuilder.co.uk

First Web Builder <http://www.firstwebbuilder.co.uk>

Links help your popularity with the search engines. They should also bring you more visitors, if the sites that link to you are relevant, and have high traffic themselves.

The key word here is "relevant". Link farms and fr'ee-for-all link sites will probably reduce your ranking and visitor popularity if anything. After all, if you visit a fishing site, you probably won't be interested in links to baby food recipes, car maintenance, or knitting. That's the view the search engines take too - it's not the quantity, it's the quality that counts.

Visitors from those links won't be buying much either. People prefer to buy from specialists or experts, rather than a jack-of-all-trades.

So what's a good link?

Take a good look round the site. Is the navigation easy? Is the content useful, and relevant to your visitors? Are you happy to recommend it to them?

If the answer to those questions is "Yes", then delve further. If you're selling a product or service, will they be in direct competition? If so, you won't want to link to them. Check the site with the IE Google toolbar (a fr'ee download from <http://toolbar.google.com>) and see how high it ranks with Google. If it's the same as, or higher than, your own site, then it's worth considering for a link.

Is the link page easy to find? It's no good having a link on a high-ranked site, if their visitors never see it. Ideally, they should link to it from every page of their site, and the link should be part of the main navigation - not down at the bottom of the page in the "small print".

So how to find those links?

Some you'll come across yourself, while surfing, if your website is related to an interest that you have. I've even found good links when helping my children with their homework! Keep a "jotter" program available while you surf, so that you can make a record of these sites. Or use a real jotter if you prefer!

But the tool I use most, and which has made finding and maintaining my link pages much easier, is Arelis - Axandra's Reciprocal Links Solution,
<http://www.firstwebbuilder.co.uk/info/arelis.html>

You can search for links by keyword, by using a website that has a similar topic, or by checking for sites that already link back to you.

Once you've deleted any sites that you aren't interested in, you can then use the built-in browser to visit the sites and decide if they should be included in your links directory.

Arelis stores these in a database. You can email the webmaster (Arelis will search out the email addresses while it finds possible link sites.) You can categorise the sites however it suits you. You also have a host of options on how far your reciprocal link with each site has got, from "Not contacted yet" to "Links back", with a range of other options to cover all eventualities.

Once you've agreed a reciprocal link, enter the URL of both your link page and theirs into the database, and then Arelis will check your links whenever you tell it to. It will check incoming and outgoing links, so you'll quickly see if one of the links on your site is broken, or if the link-back to your site no longer works.

The paid versions allow you to email and to create link pages direct from the program, as well as creating databases for more than one site.

You can try Arelis at no charge - the help file will soon have you finding links for your site, though you'll need to use your email program to contact webmasters.

Here's the link:

<http://www.firstwebbuilder.co.uk/info/arelis.html>

Linking etiquette

If you want to exchange links, it's courtesy to add their link to your site first. That way they know you're serious.

Make sure your link page can be accessed from all the pages of your site, and that the link isn't hidden in tiny print at the bottom of the page. Include it in your main navigation if possible.

You may offer special status to sites that link back - a logo or icon by their name, or being listed at the top of your link page.

Don't overload your link pages with graphics. If you use an individual button for every link, your page will load much more slowly.

Be polite when you email webmasters - it's easy to forget that they're people just like you! Don't be offended if they don't want to link back. If the link is useful (and it should be - or why ask for an exchange?) then I leave it on my site anyway.

When you send out a reciprocal link request, include the exact URL where their link can be found - don't expect them to search your link pages until they find their link.

When emailing webmasters, give details of your site title, URL, and a brief description - no more than two lines. Make it meaningful. Avoid descriptions like "The World's Greatest Web Site". This doesn't tell anything about your site content - just that the webmaster has a big head!

Happy linking!

Dianne Reuby is co-author of the e-book "First Website Builder". Dianne created and runs the First Web Builder site, dedicated to providing ebooks and tips for new webmasters.

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